



Committee on Children, February 7, 2023

Testimony in Support of SB 929, An Act Expanding School Meal Programs to Provide Free School Meals to All Students

Thank you, Senator Maher, Representative Linehan, Ranking Members and the members of the Committee on Children. My name is Jason Jakubowski and I am the President & CEO of Connecticut Foodshare - the official Feeding America food bank serving the entire state of Connecticut. I am pleased to submit testimony in support of S.B. 929 An Act Expanding School Meal Programs to Provide Free School Meals to All Students.

We thank you for considering this bill and highlighting this important issue impacting some of our most vulnerable residents- our children. **Nearly 92,000 children, or 12.6%, in Connecticut are food insecure with thousands more in households that are just getting by. Of those 92,000 children, 25% of them do not qualify for government assistance-** meaning that under the current standards they would not be eligible to receive free school meals despite experiencing food insecurity. Our network of more than 500 partner programs around the state saw a significant increase in attendance at pantries when the free school meal program ended.

Through our schools we can provide children with the space to grow into the best versions of themselves- to expand their understanding of the world around them and become community members who strive to make the world around them a better place for all of us. When students are fed, they learn better, their attendance goes up and they are more engaged. By limiting their access to food or stigmatizing them through a program that singles out students experiencing food insecurity, we are only hurting our common cause and our universal goals.

Last week, my wife received a call from the cafeteria manager at my children's high school. The manager wanted to alert us to the fact that one of our daughters had been routinely using her lunch card to buy lunches for some of her friends. The cafeteria manager said this was happening quite a bit since they started charging for meals again, as many families hadn't enrolled in free or reduced lunch programs since the fall of 2019 (pre-pandemic). My wife and I are certainly proud of our daughter for helping those who are less fortunate than she is; but a 14-year-old shouldn't have to do that. We, as a society, have both the resources and the ability to feed our school children – and if the federal government will no longer cover the expense of school meals, then we (as a state) need to.

Again: I thank you for your time and consideration. My Connecticut Foodshare team and I look forward to continuing to advocate in support of this provision.

Sincerely,

Jason Jakubowski
President & CEO
jjakubowski@ctfoodshare.org